

Ep #145: When Your Kid Gets Stuck, Do This!



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With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Welcome to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*, a podcast for parents that are tired of yelling, threatening, and punishing their kids. Join mom and master certified parent coach Lisa Smith as she gives you actionable step-by-step strategies that'll help you transform your household from chaos to cooperation. Let's dive in.

Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to today's episode. I am so excited to be with you here on our 145 episode. Amazing, right? I'm just so delighted to be with you here each week. I hear from many of you that you really get a lot from this podcast.

So it is my honor, I want you to know, to be with you every week and to serve you in this way and enlighten you, share tools, share ideas, share coaching, share what real world peaceful parenting really can look like for you and your family.

In my coaching hours, parents often come to me looking for a change so that they can parent in a more peaceful way. I know what a lot of us want is to feel confident in our ability to peacefully parent. Sometimes our brain thinks we're on the right path doing the right thing, but it's not working.

Yeah, I've been there myself. In my own journey, I've created for myself a mission to be the parent I wished I'd had. Many of the parents who come to me for coaching, what we do is we dissect what's really going on. We look at it from a new angle, we talk about what might be going on for the kid, we get underneath the behavior. What comes from that often is a new approach, a new perspective, new thoughts, new tools. As a result of that, the transformation happens.

Through the work that I do with my clients, we often uncover childhood wounds that we still operate in, from, and through as adults. Each situation we encounter as adults and as parents is seen through our own unique

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lens of our experiences, including our childhood wounds. I want you to really hear that.

One such wound that comes up a lot for us as parents is the wound of feeling unheard. Sometimes because of that now, as adults, we want it to be our turn. We didn't feel heard as a child. We had to do all the listening in our childhood and none of the talking. So now we want to be heard. We want it to be our turn. We want to be understood. We want to be obeyed. We want to be revered and respected. We want our beautiful, peaceful, loving suggestions to be followed.

Yeah? I get that. We want to have the power to fix things that need fixing, to teach things that need to be taught, and to heal things that are hurting. We often find ourselves frustrated because this is not the reality that is happening real time. We're working hard to fix, teach, and heal, and the child is not picking up what we're putting down. So the saying goes right.

This is true of a mom that I recently coached. We're going to call her Annie. Annie shared that she grew up in the background of her family, witnessing dramas between her parents and her sisters unfold while she sat back feeling unable to contribute any thoughts or suggestions to help fix the chaos, the drama, and the mistakes that were unfolding in front of her.

Fast forward to now, Annie as a parent herself, mother of four, no longer wants to be the person who sits back to be nothing but a watcher while everything around her falls apart. She wants to be the one who fixes whatever needs to be fixed. Can you relate to this?

Annie has a deep desire to know there is something she can do to help in chaotic or dysregulated situations. Let me tell you, in her family of six, four kids and two parents, those situations happen on the regular. More times than not, the drama, chaos, dysregulation, and frustration seems to revolve

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around Annie's firstborn 13 year old, very strong willed in the middle of puberty, who we're going to call Simon.

Annie gets frustrated when she has a plan, specifically a schedule of what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, how it needs to be done so she can get each of her four children where they need to be when they need to be there. Lo and behold, there is Simon, once again, digging in, refusing to go along with the plan, tormenting his siblings, refusing to cooperate, and following her perfect plan.

Now, if you can relate to Annie, I'm here to tell you, this episode is for you. Things can get better, but maybe not in the moment of chaos or dysregulation when you're trying to rush everyone into the car to move on to the next thing.

This is how you grow yourself up a little bit and heal the wound. Annie's been working with me for quite some time. She's made amazing progress in allowing her children to feel and unload their feelings when their emotional backpacks get full, even Simon's. I mean, she is a gold medalist at letting her kids feel their feelings.

However, many of Simon storms where he wants to unload his feelings happen in the middle of transition while transition is required. At times, like the family needs to get out the door. During these high stress moments, Annie is desperate to have Simon hear her and cooperate with her schedule and plan and really follow her authority as the parent.

Yeah? You can relate to this. Guess what? It is during these moments, often, not always, but often that Simon gets really, really, really dysregulated. So Annie's working really hard to get Simon to hear her, and Simon's not listening.

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Here's what I know. When you have a kid like Simon, this is not the time to expect, demand, or require your children to hear you. If they are not ready to hear what you have to say, the greatest suggestion in the whole world falls on deaf ears. The receiver of the information has to be ready and able to hear it. When someone is storming, the increased cortisol in the body literally, scientifically, physically blocks their hearing, and it makes it impossible for them to hear you.

This is the whole idea of being the peaceful leader of the household. Peaceful parenting is when we use our power to come alongside our child and guide them. Part of guiding them means the realization that they may not always be ready to hear the lesson you want to teach them when you're ready to teach it. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Hopefully, the light bulb is going on.

Growing in emotional maturity is recognizing when they are ready to hear what it is you have to say. Let me say that again. Growing in emotional maturity is recognizing when your kids, or anybody for that matter, when they're ready to hear what it is you have to say.

Along with storms and increased cortisol, there is also a group of humans who just get stuck. Capital S, capital T, capital U, capital C, capital K, underlined, bolded and stuck. A lot of us humans struggle with change. In the lives of all humans, there is a natural tension in change and transition that happens to the central nervous system.

We are organically hardwired for habit and familiarity and consistency. It has been identified that there are five kinds of change that disrupt us, change of routine, change of environment, change of relationship, change of activity, change of day and season, and change of age.

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Now, kids experience this aversion to change on a micro level. What I mean by that is, they can become dysregulated after school, the change of after school, the change of going to bed. For many, the change of transition to whatever is next. I think there are humans that do transition better than others.

The way some kids work, they decide something. If it doesn't happen the way they've decided it, they get stuck. This is a really important word. They get stuck. Then the parents get dysregulated over the kids' stuckness, which if that is not a word, it is now.

All they want to do in these situations as the parent is get the kid moving forward, move him or her on to the next thing. The problem is that when Simon, for instance, gets stuck, he can't move to the next thing until someone validates that he's stuck. Maybe some light bulbs are going off for you right now. What I think the secret sauce is, as a parent, to create the connection and cooperation is to validate that he's stuck and reassure him that it's okay.

Now his stuckness, you might be thinking, is his shadow side. Your way of trying to fix it is to simply tell him, encourage him, demand that he just get unstuck. Just get in the car. We've got to get to soccer. We've got to get to parent school night. Get over not going to the football game you wanted to go to and go take a shower, move to the next thing. It goes something like this.

Listen, dude, we don't have time for you to be stuck. So just get moving. It's okay to be mad and feel your feelings, but you have to feel them while moving on to the next thing. You can feel your feelings, but you can't stay stuck. Or maybe we say something like feel your feelings in the shower, feel your feelings in the car on the way to parent night.

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The problem is the more you try to encourage or demand that your kid keeps your schedule and plan, the more the kid can get frozen in his stuckness. What I really offer is that he sees his stuckness as his superpower, not his shadow side. So what can Annie and parents like her, maybe you, do about this?

Well, there's one word, and it's acceptance. Accept that you have a kid that gets really stuck. Accept that there are times when he can't get in the shower in that moment, validate that, make that okay, find new parameters to work with. Maybe you give him a few minutes and check back. Maybe you give him some oxygen and space by leaving the room. Maybe you pick the 80/20. So that night if he needs to be stuck in his room, and he never gets in the shower, you let it be the 20% of the time that you just let him be stuck.

What's happening now is we're power struggling over who's going to win. You want your kid to move the next task, but he is literally stuck and can't and you're power struggling over this. So drop the power struggle and give a kid like Simon space to be stuck.

In situations like Annie's and Simon's, I would have three things I would say. Number one, son, I see you're stuck. I get it, buddy. Number two, I can help you get unstuck, or I can leave you to work through it on your own. Because either way, I know you'll figure it out.

Now remember, one of the most important things teenagers want to know is am I going to be okay? So you want to have the utmost confidence that he can move out of this cycle. You want to present as though you know it will happen. You can help him, or he can do it on his own. But either way, you know that he can get unstuck.

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Number three, you want to say I can help you, or I can let you do it on your own. Now, number three is for the times that your kid likes to project his stuckness onto his siblings by getting into a fight with them, or hurting them physically or calling them names. So this happens a lot for Simon in the past when he's gotten stuck.

So what I would say to a kid like Simon is I can help you get unstuck, or I can let you do it on your own. But what I can't do is let you project your stuckness onto others and hurt them. So this is where I will draw the line. As the mom or as the parent, I will not allow you to hurt your siblings.

What Simon has learned is that if any pushes him to take a shower, push, push, push, push, push, it increases his big emotions like anger and frustration. Then he projects his frustration with being stuck onto his siblings physically and with his words.

I encourage parents with a Simon of their own to say hey, I recognize that you're stuck. That's okay. I can help you. You can work through it on your own, but what we're not going to do is project, and I think you should actually use that word. What we're not going to do is project our stuckness onto other people by physically hurting them or emotionally calling them names. This is where I have to step in and protect the other people in the family.

I think this projection happens a lot in households where kids get stuck. The kid projects their stuckness onto their siblings and then the parent gets triggered, often by a childhood wound of their own. The power struggle ensues and nobody wins.

I remember a story of a client recently telling me that when she was young, her father had an accident that left him as a quadriplegic. As we were talking about stuckness, she was having a gigantic lightbulb moment. She

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said after the accident her older brother, who was a teenager at the time, got really stuck in big emotions like anger and frustration. Every day he would punch her really hard, and it would hurt.

She realizes now that he needed help getting unstuck. She needed her mother to protect her from his stuckness. No one was there to do it. At the same time that that parent needed to help the son move out of the stuckness, the mother needed to protect the sister. As the parent in these situations, you say, in a loving way, I will help you get unstuck. At the same time, I will protect your siblings if you cross the line and project all of that onto them.

For Annie, I know she's going to feel empowered by recognizing what's going on for Simon and not always pushing him to the next thing. But by helping him acknowledge the stuckness and physically protecting the siblings, she's going to feel heard and empowered with an action plan that serves all parties.

So, again, it sounds like Simon, I'm here to help you. I recognize that you're stuck. The next step is to help you get unstuck. I can help you, I can give you space to do it on your own, but what I won't do is allow you to project it onto your siblings. If you can't get in the shower tonight and you need to stay in your room, I totally support that.

I can see why many parents would think let's get him unstuck so that we can direct him to the next activity. For some kids that works, but not for kids like Simon. He cannot be redirected to the next activity when he's knee deep in stuckness.

So what do you do when you have somewhere you need to be, and you don't have time to sit around and wait for Simon to get unstuck in his bedroom? Well, it might look like this, "Hey, Simon, are you able to get in

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the car and be stuck in the car? Can you ride in the front seat and put some headphones on?"

You have to get creative and find ways to move forward while helping Simon work through the stuckness in ways that don't invite a power struggle because Simon doesn't have the brain development yet. He hasn't developed the ability to compartmentalize his stuckness. That's okay.

In this conversation, Annie was able to recognize that she gets stuck too. Because while Simon's wound of getting stuck is coming into the room, his stuckness triggers Annie into believing he's not listening to her. So her wound of feeling unheard rears its head that nobody listens to her because she sees that he won't move to the next thing as him not listening rather than seeing it as he stuck.

Many parents like Annie say something to me like Lisa, I've done it. I've shown empathy. I allowed his feelings. I acknowledged his pain. I've done all the things. Now it's my turn for him to listen to me. He's not getting in the car. So this activates our own childhood wound.

As we were coaching, Annie recognized that it's not always about the stuckness that triggers her wound. Sometimes it's also I'm trying to explain a lesson to him. I'm trying to be heard. I'm trying to fix the problem, and he's not listening. My answer was you're right. He's not. He's not able to because he's stuck not because he doesn't want to hear you.

Lessons about turning on the internal compass are a lifetime struggle. It's not like it's an on and off. Some days I'm better at the lesson than I am other days. Some days I get it in one way or another. It might not benefit you as the parent to think about it as all or nothing.

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If you're looking at it like did he get the lesson? If he did, then he's a good kid. He heard and understood me, and I'm a good parent. I'm validated. If you do that, drop that. That doesn't serve any of us. Children are a lifelong experiment. There are conclusions to be drawn way into the future. It's like this is not a short term clinical study. It's not a two week trial where we're going to do the experiment and write up the conclusions. Lots of kids get stuck. It's common. You're ready to move on, but it doesn't mean I, as the kid, am ready to move on.

The solution is to help the Simon's recognize that stuck is a thing, and that you love him the same whether he stuck or not. This is who he is, and you accept it. You believe 100% that he can get unstuck. Think about this when Simon doesn't get into the college he wants to go to. Think about this when Simon doesn't get picked for the basketball team.

When a kid is stuck, it's often derived from he feels his feelings so deeply. He's yet to cultivate the skills of being able to compartmentalize, change his perspective, move on, or put it away for a little while. This is going to be great for Simon to identify, "Oh yeah, sometimes I get stuck on emotional things because I have an expectation that doesn't get met, but that doesn't mean anything about me. It's just a part of who I am. I have to develop the skills to be able to regroup and get through it. It's not a move on. It's a get through it." You can help your kid develop language that will help them feel accepted and know it's going to be okay. Then develop a process to get through the stuckness as appropriate.

I have this theory that all of our strengths, every single one of us, whatever are strengths are cross over to a weakness if they're not managed correctly. Like my interest in people is my hobby. But sometimes it crosses over into a weakness by draining me if I don't take some time to rest or have downtime.

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This feeds into my theory what you love about your partner or your co-parent sometimes makes you want to punch him or her in the throat because it crosses over from a strength to a weakness. If not managed correctly.

I believe that this is our assignments superpower, that he gets stuck. Sometimes he just has to learn how to work with this stuckness and keep it on the fine line or on the side of strength and not let it tumble over into a weakness. Let me explain. Stuck is also called hyper focused and obsessed and meeting goals and being determined, right? That's the strength side of it.

It crosses over into a weakness when he's being defied at home and getting stuck on something that he can't move through and expressing his big negative emotions as a result of the stuckness. So when it's our strength, it's called hyper focused. Like when your kid's obsessed with a test or studying or a sport or a musical instrument or being in a band, it's hyper focused. It crosses over into a weakness when it becomes stuck. It's all the same thing.

So as long as we take this skill or this strength or this characteristic, and we keep it on the side of strength, we know how to manage it. When it crosses over to a weakness, we start to give it a very negative vocabulary. Then it triggers our wound as parents, of feeling not heard in Annie's case, because he quote will not move forward. But he can't, he's stuck. He's often stuck in positive things in the form of hyper focus. But in this particular day, he got stuck and got dysregulated and expressed his big negative emotions because he was stuck.

Now it doesn't mean that your kid's always going to be like this. You can help them. But step one is the acceptance of how the kid presents right now, right now in his stuckness, because he's likely feeling that he's not

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accepted, and that he's not okay. He might even feel a little bit rejected because there is not an acceptance about the stuckness. There is this insistence of pushing him to the next phase rather than accepting that he's stuck and helping him move forward.

So step one is acceptance in our kids in how they present. Then we can give him a language the family can use that isn't an attack on his character just because he's stuck. We can give the stuck a vocabulary that's very neutral. Oh, I see you're just getting stuck over this. That's okay. What do you need? What do you need from me? Do you need me to sit with you? Do you need to be alone? Do you need me to not ask you to move on? What do you need in your stuckness?

The acceptance of the stuckness and the normalization of it will allow him to figure out what he needs and communicate it to you rather than being defiant in his stuckness. Maybe he just needs to be really mad for a little while. He needs to express his big negative emotions because he really wanted to do something or get something or have something that isn't happening.

You might just take the attitude as the parent of hey, no big deal. You can project that outward onto me. I get it. You're a kid. This is what you do. Go for it. Then you can just listen to relieve his suffering without taking it personally or getting triggered in your own wounds. Is this resonating with you? Do you see yourself in Annie and Simon? Are light bulbs going off for you right now? I sure hope so.

I sure hope that I've shed new light on the plight of the stuck kid, and you're able to look at your kid in a whole new way. Rather than taking it personally and unpacking your own childhood wounds and rushing your kid through it or expecting them to move on to the next thing, you can have a real

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appreciation for their stuckness, and an empathy for what they need, and a curiosity for helping them figure out what they need.

Just helping them sit with the stuckness and move through it, rather than rushed to the next thing. Rather than moving them on to a task, letting them sit in the stuckness for a little bit and normalize that, make that okay, understand how that's a part of their superpower. Really love them and accept them while they're sitting in the stuckness. Okay, until we meet again, I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

Thank you so much for listening today. I want to personally invite you to head over to thepeacefulparent.com/welcome and sign up for my free Peaceful Parenting minicourse. You'll find everything you need to get started on the path to peaceful parenting just waiting for you over there at www.thepeacefulparent.com/welcome. I can't wait for you to get started.

Thanks for listening to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit thepeacefulparent.com. See you soon.